

This was thyn ooth, and myn also certeyn;
I woot right wel thou darst it nat withseyne.
Thus artow of my conseil, out of doute:
And now thou woldest falsly been aboute
To love my lady, whom I love and serve,
And evere shal, til that myn herte sterve.
Nay, certes, false Arcite, thou shalt nat so;
I loved hire first, and tolde thee my wo
As to my conseil, and my brother sworn
To forthe me, as I have toold biforn.
For which thou art ybounden as a knyght
To helpen me, if it lay in thy myght,
Or elles artow fals, I dar wel seyn.

THIS Arcite ful proudly spak ageyn;
Thow shalt, quod he, be rather fals than I,
And thou art fals, I telle thee, outrely,
for par amour I loved hire first er thow.
What wiltow seyn? thou wistest nat yet now
Whether she be a womman or goddesse.
Thyn is affeccioun of hooolynesse,
And myn is love as to a creature,
for which I tolde thee myn aventure
As to my cosyn and my brother sworn.
I pose that thou lovedest hire biforn,
Mostow nat wel the olde clerkes sawe,
That who shal yeve a love any lawe?
Love is a gretter lawe, by my pan,
Than may be yeve of any erthely man?
And therfore positif lawe and swich decree
Is broken al day for love in ech degree.
A man moot nedes love maugree his heed;
He may nat flec it, though he sholde be deed,
Al be she mayde, or wydwe, or elles wyf;
And eek it is nat likly al thy lyf
To stonden in hir grace, namoore shal I;
for wel thou woost, thyselven verrailly,
That thou and I be dampned to prisoun
Perpetuelly; us gayneth no raunsoun.
We stryven as dide the boundes for the boon,
They foughte al day, and yet hir part was noon;
Ther cam a kyte, whil they weren so wrothe,
And baar away the boon bitwix hem bothe;
And therfore, at the kynges court, my brother,
Ech man for hymself, ther is noon oother.
Love, if thee list, for I love and ay shal,
And soothly, levee brother, this is al.
Heere in this prisoun moote we endure
And everich of us take his aventure.

GREET was the strif, and long, bitwix hem
tweye,
If that I hadde leyser for to seye;
But to the effect, It happed on a day,
To telle it yow as shortly as I may,
A worthy duc, that highte Perotheus,
That felawe was unto duc Theseus,
Syn thilke day that they were children lite,
Was come to Atthenes, his felawe to visite,
And for to pleye, as he was wont to do;
for in this world he loved no man so,
And he loved hym als tendrely agayn.
So wel they lovede, as old bookes sayn,
That whan that oon was deed, soothly to telle,
His felawe wente and soughte hym down in helle;

But of that storie list me nat to write.
Duc Perotheus loved wel Arcite,
And hadde hym knowe at Thebes yere by yere;
And finally, at request and preyere
Of Perotheus, withoute any raunsoun,
Duc Theseus hym leet out of prisoun
frelly to goon wher that hym liste over al,
In swich a gyse as I you tellen shal.
This was the forward, pleyntly for tendite,
Bitwixen Theseus and hym Arcite;
That if so were that Arcite were yfounde,
Evere in his lif, by day or nyght, o stounde,
In any contree of this Theseus,
And he were caught, it was acorded thus,
That with a sward he sholde lese his heed:
Ther nas noon oother remedie, ne reed,
But taketh his leve and homward he him spedde.
Lat hym be war, his nekke lith to wedde.
How greet a sorwe suffreth now Arcite!
The deeth he feeleth thurgh his herte smyte;
He wepeth, wayleth, crieth pitously;
To sleen hymself he waiteth prively.
He seyde, **A**llas that day that I was born!
Now is my prisoun worse than biforn;
Now is me shape eternally to dwelle,
Nat in my purgatorie, but in helle.
Allas that evere knew I Perotheus!
for elles hadde I dwelled with Theseus
Yfetered in his prisoun everemo.
Channe hadde I been in blisse, and nat in wo,
Only the sighte of hire whom that I serve,
Though that I nevere hir grace may deserve,
Wolde han sufficed right ynough for me.
O deere cosyn Palamon, quod he,
Thyn is the victorie of this aventure
ful blisfully in prison maistow dure,
In prisoun? certes nay, but paradys!
Wel hath fortune turned thee the dys,
That hast the sighte of hire and I thabscence,
for possible is, syn thou hast hire presence,
And art a knyght, a worthy and an able,
That by som cas, syn fortune is chaungeable,
Thow maist to thy desir some tyme attayne,
But I, that am exiled and bareyne
Of alle grace, and in so greet dispeir,
That ther nys erthe, water, fyr, ne eir,
Ne creature, that of hem maketh is,
That may me heele, or doon confort in this.
Wel oughte I sterve in wanhope and distresse;
farwel, my lif, my lust and my gladnesse.
Allas, why pleyen folk so in commune
Of purveiaunce of God, or of fortune,
That yeveth hem ful ofte in many a gyse
Wel bettre than they kan hemself devyse?
Som man desireth for to han richesse,
That cause is of his mordre, or greet siknesse;
And som man wolde out of his prisoun fayn,
That in his hous is of his meynce slayn.
Infinite harmes been in this mateere,
We witen nat what thing we preyen heere.
We faren as he that dronke is as a mous.
A dronke man woot wel he hath an hous,
But he noot which the righte wey is thider,

And to a dronke man the wey is slider;
And certes in this world so faren we,
We seken faste after feliciee,
But we goon wrong ful often trewely.
Thus may we seyen alle, and namely I,
That wende and hadde a greet opinoun
That if I myght escapen from prisoun,
Channe hadde I been in joye and perfit heele,
That now I am exiled fro my wele.
Syn that I may nat seen you, Emelye,
I nam but deed, there nys no remedye.
UPON that oother syde, Palamon,
Whan that he wiste Arcite was agon,
Swich sorwe he maketh that the grette tour
Resound of his youlyng and clamour;
The pure fettres on his shynes grette
Weren of his bittre, salte teeres wete.
Allas! quod he, Arcite, cosyn myn,
Of al our strif, God woot, the fruyt is thyn;
Thow walkest now in Thebes at thy large,
And of my wo thou yevest litel charge.
Thou mayst, syn thou hast wysdom & man hede,
Assemblen alle the folk of oure kynrede,
And make a werre so sharpe on this citee,
That by som aventure, or som trefce,
Thow mayst have hire to lady and to wyf
for whom that I mot nedes lese my lyf.
for as by wey of possibilitee,
Sith thou art at thy large, of prisoun free,
And art a lord, greet is thyn avauntage,
Moore than is myn that sterve here in a cage;
for I moot wepe and wayle whil I live,
With al the wo that prison may me yeve,
And eek with payne that love me yeveth also,
That doubleth al my torment and my wo.
Therwith the fyr of jalousie up sterte
Withinne his brest, and hente him by the herte
So woodly, that he lyk was to biholde
The boxtre, or the asshe, dede and colde.
Channe seyde he, **O** cruel goddes that governe
This world with byndyng of youre word eterne
And writen in the table of atthamaunt
Your parlement and youre eterne graunt,
What is mankynde moore unto you holde
Than is the sheepe that rouketh in the folde?
for slayn is man, right as another beest,
And dwelleth eek in prison and arreest,
And hath siknesse and greet adversitee.
And ofte tymes gilteless pardee.
What governance is in this prescience,
That gilteless tormenteth innocence?
And yet encresseth this al my penaunce,
That man is bounden to his observaunce
for Goddes sake to letten of his wille,
Ther as a beest may all his lust fulfille;
And whan a beest is deed he hath no payne,
But after his deeth man moot wepe and pleyne,
Though in this world he have care and wo,
Withouten doute may it stonden so.
The answer of this lete I to dyvynys,
But well I woot that in this world greet pyne ys.
Allas! I se a serpent or a theef,
That many a trewe man hath doon mescheef,

Goon at his large, and where hym list may turne;
But I moot been in prisoun thurgh Saturne,
And eek thurgh Juno, jalous and eek wood,
That hath destroyed wel ny al the blood
Of Thebes with his waste walles wyde;
And Venus sleeth me on that oother syde
for jalousie and fere of hym Arcite.
NOW wol I stynte of Palamon a lite
And lete hym in his prisoun stille dwelle,
And of Arcite forth I wol yow telle.
The somer passeth, and the nyghtes longe
Encressen double wise the peynes stronge
Bothe of the love and the prisoner.
I noot which hath the wofuller mester;
for shortly for to seyn, this Palamon
Perpetuelly is dampned to prisoun
In cheynes and in fettres to been deed,
And Arcite is exiled upon his heed
for evere mo as out of that contree,
Ne nevere mo he shal his lady see.
Yow lovers, axe I now this questioun,
Who hath the worse, Arcite or Palamon?
That oon may seen his lady day by day,
But in prisoun he moot dwellen alway;
That oother, wher hym list may ride or go,
But seen his lady shal he nevere mo.
Now demeth as yow liste, ye that kan,
for I wol telle forth as I bigan.

Explicit pars prima. Sequitur pars secunda.

WHAN that Arcite to Thebes comen was,
ful ofte a day he swelte
and seyde, **A**llas!
for seen his lady shal he
nevere mo.
And, shortly to concluden
al his wo,
So muche sorwe had
nevere creature
That is or shal, whil that the world may dure.
His slepe, his mete, his drynke, is hym biraft,
That lene he wexe and drye as is a shaft;
His eyen holwe, and grisly to biholde,
His hewe falow and pale as asshe colde,
And solitarie he was and evere allone,
And waillynge al the nyght, makynge his mone;
And if he herde song or instrument
Channe wolde he wepe, he myghte nat be stent;
So feble eek were his spirits and so lowe,
And chaunged so that no man koude knowe
His speche nor his voys, though men it herde
And in his geere for al the world he ferde,
Nat oonly like the loveris maladye
Of hereos, but rather lyk manye
Engendred of humour malencolik
Biforn his owene celle fantastik.
And shortly turned was al up so doun
Bothe habit and eek disposicion
Of hym, this woful love daun Arcite.
WHAN that he ended had his wo endite?
Whan he endured hadde a yere or two
This cruel torment and this payne & woo,
At Thebes, in his contree, as I seyde,